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AN INTRODUCTION TO COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

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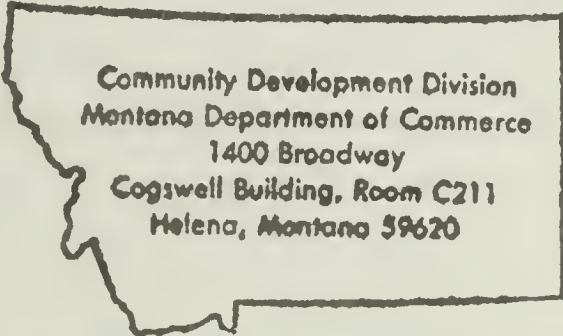
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December 12, 1975

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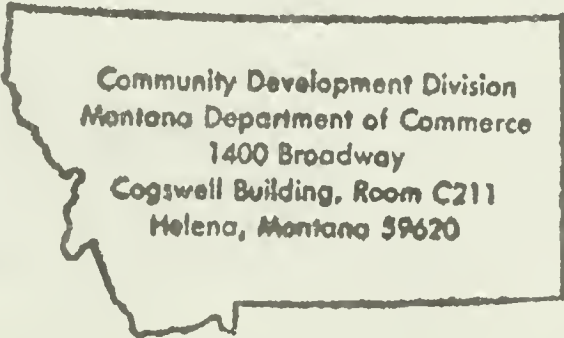
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## AN INTRODUCTION TO COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

This document contains material which constitutes a "short course in city and county planning. Its purpose is to acquaint members of planning boards in Hill, Blaine, and Liberty Counties, Montana with some of the general planning principles and techniques that they will need to know in making day-to-day decisions about land use and development. Some of the ideas and concepts will be "old hat" to some, while, to some of the less experienced planning board members, it will be altogether new material. However, this "short course" will attempt to present a framework for planning, and will, hopefully, provide a common understanding of fundamental terms, concepts, principles, and techniques used in city and county planning.

### What Is Community Planning?

Planning for the future physical growth and development of a community, whether it is for a small town, a city, a county, a group of counties, or even the entire state of Montana, means looking ahead and attempting to determine what the future holds in terms of the economy, in terms of overall lifestyles of people, and in terms of the degree of technological advancement that our society will have attained. Thus, if one can make assumptions and "educated guesses" about what may happen in a community, one can, depending on the accuracy of the assumptions made, plan and program the community services and

facilities which will be needed to accomodate future growth which will occur.

Through planning, a community can ensure that there will be enough water and sewer lines, of sufficient diameter, and in suitable locations. The community can ensure that there will be adequate and appropriately-located fire and police stations, streets and highways, parks, hospitals, schools, and other public or quasi-public facilities to serve new members of the community. Finally, through effective and comprehensive planning, a community can make itself a more desirable place in which to live and work.

### The Role of the Planning Board in the Community

The laws of Montana have enabled counties, cities, and counties and cities jointly, to create citizen-member planning boards (Sections 11-3801 through 11-3858, R.C.M., 1947). These Boards advise the elected officials on matters of community growth and development. They are specifically authorized to process and evaluate proposed subdivisions of land, and recommend that the governing body approve or disapprove subdivision plans and plats. Planning boards are also empowered to act as zoning commissions in formulating zoning regulations.

A planning board, however, should not merely process subdivisions and formulate zoning regulations. The Board should be the center of activity in a community's planning effort. The Board should give a majority of its collective thought and effort to the overall future development of the community: Will the community grow or decline? What kinds of industries are desired, or are not desired? What types of shopping establishments are needed, and where should they be lo-



cated? How much, and what types of housing are required, and in what parts of the community should they be built? What future parks and recreation facilities should be contemplated? Generally speaking, the major task of the Planning Board is to work with other community organizations and individual citizens in designing the future environment of the community.

### Planning--A Process, Not a Product

The culmination of the planning effort is the Comprehensive Plan of the city or county. This document describes, in written and graphic form, officially-adopted policies on all aspects of physical growth and development which will take place in the community. There are many people who believe that once a city or county has prepared and adopted its Comprehensive Plan, the planning effort ceases. This is far from the case, however. As will be shown in the next section, the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan is only a part of the total comprehensive process.

Community planning is a process, rather than a product. This process is a never-ending sequence of events involving the entire community. It is a method of initiating and maintaining collective thinking about problems and issues arising from the physical, economic, and social growth of the community.

## THE COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS

There are five major phases in the process of comprehensive planning (see illustration): (1) develop goals and objectives (2) conduct surveys, (3) undertake a community analysis, (4) prepare the Comprehensive Plan, and (5) implement the comprehensive plan. Every community proceeds through these five phases or steps in the course of its planning activities. Although the phases are generally mutually exclusive in that they encompass different kinds of activities occurring during different points in time, the various phases do not always have to occur in the order outlined below, or two or more phases could possibly be undertaken at the same time. However, it is important to remember that the method of researching and interpreting planning information is much more significant than the sequence in which it is done.

### 1. Develop Goals and Objectives

The first phase of any community planning effort is determining "where do we want to go from here?" The community, in general, and the Planning Board, in particular, should be in a position to express at least general goals and directions that the community should strive toward. In addition to general, rather broad, goals, the Planning Board should establish rather specific objectives to be undertaken



in an effort to attain the stated goal. For example, the Board might adopt a goal "to make suitable housing available to those of moderate or low income." An objective relating to this goal would be "to build X units of multi-family housing in the south end of town, to build Y units of single family conventional housing in the east side, and to construct Z units of housing in mobile home parks in the north end of town."

All goals and objectives do not necessarily have to be formulated at the outset of the community planning effort. They can be developed or stated at any time, but preferably prior to the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan. In any case, a goal or objective should be established when there is sufficient information available so as to perceive a problem or need that can be addressed by a suitable goal and/or objective.

## 2. Conduct Surveys

Once broad goals and general directions have been established in the planning effort, the Planning Board should begin to take a close look at the community. The community consists of people who impact on the land (natural landscape) to create the environment of the community. (See illustration). It is important that a basic understanding be gained of the ways that certain kinds of people modify the land to create different kinds of environment.

### The People

Characteristics of people that inhabit a community vary widely. For

planning purposes, we are concerned with the total numbers of people, their relative age or youth, ratios of males to females, and racial characteristics of the population. Other essential population characteristics might include educational levels, employment and income, cultural and ethnic backgrounds of various population groups within the community, and governmental and political institutions existing within the community.

### The Land

The character of the natural landscape and natural resource base largely determine the extent, type, and location of urban development. A knowledge of the geology (the structure and characteristics of materials underlying the Earth's surface) and soils (the materials lying on and immediately below the surface, derived from bedrock) is necessary in keeping urban development away from areas where landslides, avalanches, or earthquakes are likely to occur. Building foundations should be constructed where soils are stable and do not expand when wetted. The knowledge of geology and soils is needed in determining the location of valuable mineral deposits which should not be developed for urban use. For example, sand and gravel deposits near cities and towns should be mined prior to development. Development should not be allowed to occur in areas of high-quality agricultural soils where high-yield crops are grown.

Topography and drainage and hydrological characteristics of an area are often related to the geology and soils. It is very important to control development in flood-plain areas and in places where there is a high water table.

Climate is a factor which is often ignored when planning for a community. The amount, type, and timing of rainfall and snowfall,

prevailing wind directions, temperature ranges, presence of air inversions, and other climatic factors should influence the types, orientation and location of industry, housing, and commercial establishments.

The types and location of native plant and animal species should be considered when planning for new developments. Would a proposed development destroy the habitat of an endangered species, for example?

### The Environment

The environment, or the surroundings in which we live, is the sum total of conditions, created by man over time, as he impacts upon, and modifies the land. One of the most observable examples of man modifying the landscape is the land use pattern. The type of land use (farms, factories, shopping centers, houses), its intensity or density of use (number of houses per acre or persons per square feet in a factory), and its geographic distribution (extent and location) largely determines the overall quality of the human environment. For example, the land use pattern in an urban setting may be inappropriate or inharmonious, as in the case of a slaughter-house located adjacent to a \$100,000 residence. Intensity of use might lead toward environmental degradation where there are too many people or houses situated within a given area.

Housing, or residential land use, deserves special emphasis in evaluating the environment of the community, since people spend a greater portion of their time in their homes. A community housing survey should initially evaluate the structural condition of housing. An identification should be made of those dwellings which are dilapidated, and should be replaced, and deteriorating structures, which

can be rehabilitated. The end product of the initial phase of the housing survey would be a map of the community showing the location, housing type (single-family, mobile home, duplexes, multiple-family, and group quarters--dormitories, barracks, rooming houses, etc.), and structural condition (dilapidated, deteriorating, sound).

Secondly, a study of the community's housing market should determine what kinds of housing are available for sale or rent, and the corresponding price or rent of that housing. This information, when compared with the income information previously gathered, would enable the Planning Board to determine the numbers of persons who cannot afford suitable housing. (A family should not spend over 25% of its gross income on housing).

Another part of the survey of the environment of the community is determining the location and servicing capacity of public and quasi-public facilities. These facilities would include circulation facilities for facilitating the movement of people and goods (streets, highways, public transit, railroad, and airport). Other facilities would include utilities (water supply, sewerage, solid waste disposal, natural gas, electricity, and cable television), parks and recreational facilities and associated open space, facilities for public safety (fire and police stations), public health facilities (hospitals, clinics, ambulance service, convalescent homes, etc.), public administration facilities (county courthouse, city hall, and office facilities for federal and state government), public and private schools, libraries, museums, fairgrounds, and any other public or quasi-public facilities which are considered to be a part of the community.



The final part of the environmental survey attempts to document the existence and levels of various forms of land, water, and air pollution within the community environment. Although the Planning Board is not directly responsible for monitoring and abating environmental pollution, it can, through its policies on land use and public facility development, minimize the effects of pollution. For example, the Board could recommend that an industry emitting odor and fumes be located downwind from other urban uses. The Board could encourage the paving of streets to minimize dust pollution in the air.

In its review of proposed development, the Planning Board, with the aid of the environmental impact statement (if one is submitted) should attempt to discover all of the adverse impacts a development might have upon its surroundings and upon the community, particularly in regard to the air, water, and land pollution it may create.

### 3. Undertake Analysis

The third major phase of the comprehensive planning process is the evaluation of the overall quality of the community environment which was previously surveyed in Phase 2. The Planning Board, with the aid of its planning staff, analyzes each of the major environmental sectors (land use, community facilities, and environmental pollution) in light of planning principles and standards.

Planning principles are fundamental concepts in environmental design. They are used to enhance the environment of a community through design and creation of surroundings which are healthier, safer, more convenient, less expensive to construct, or which are more

visually pleasing. An example of a planning principle is: "An elementary school should be located near the center of the neighborhood, within walking distance of all the pupils living in the neighborhood (approximately 1/2 mile), and away from heavily-traveled streets."

Planning standards also are for the purpose of designing a better future community environment. Unlike planning principles, planning standards are capable of quantification. "Arterial streets should have a right-of-way width of 120 feet, collector streets--80 feet, and minor streets--60 feet," are examples of planning standards.

As the environmental analysis progresses many inadequacies inherent within the community or its component subsystems may come to light, such as congested streets, overcrowded schools, or overloaded sewers. Possibly, some of these shortcomings were previously unsuspected. When these problems are discovered, it may become necessary to revise or add to goals and objectives, previously adopted during Phase 1 of the comprehensive planning process.

The end product of the community analysis should be a complete documentation of the community's ills. The next major phase of the comprehensive planning process--the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan--should prescribe treatment of those ills.

#### 4. Prepare Comprehensive Plan

Preparation of the community's Comprehensive Plan (may also be called a master plan or a general plan) is the culmination of the community's planning efforts. The Comprehensive Plan should reflect



the thoughts and efforts of many segments of the community, including the elected officials, the Planning Board, the staffs of local governmental agencies, various civic, professional, and special interest groups, and the individual citizens of the city or county.

Above all else, the Comprehensive Plan should be a collection of policy statements dealing with all aspects of future growth and development to take place within the community. These policy statements should originate with, or at least have the official blessing, of the elected officials, and the Comprehensive Plan should be officially adopted by the City Council and/or the Board of County Commissioners.

The Comprehensive Plan, normally, is comprised of many subplans, or plan elements. There are three primary types of plan elements: (1) those dealing with the use of privately-owned lands, or land use plans, (2) those dealing with the development of public or quasi-public lands, facilities, or services, and (3) those which are a combination of (1) and (2).

#### Land Use Plans

Land use plans are the plan element or elements of the Comprehensive Plan which outline and describe official public policies on the use and future development of privately-owned lands in the community. The land use policies, expressed in written and graphic form, should describe and identify general areas in the community and their desired future use or uses--whether they should be devoted to housing, shopping facilities, industry, agriculture, or possibly a mixture of uses or activities. Special emphasis should be devoted to the relationships, both spatial and functional, that the general areas of land use should have to each other (i.e., does the community desire a "harmonious" or "appropriate" pattern of land use?). Also, it is necessary that the land use plan element address itself to density, or intensity standards

of land use ( e.g., which areas in the community should be devoted to multi-family housing and which areas to single-family housing?)

The land use plan element, ideally, should form the basis for zoning regulations, which control the character and intensity of land use. (Zoning and other mechanisms for implementing the Comprehensive Plan will be discussed below, in the final phase (Phase 5) of the comprehensive planning process).

### Public Facility Plans

Public facility plans are the plan element or elements of the Comprehensive Plan outlining official public policies on the future development of public and quasi-public lands and facilities. Policies on public facility development must directly correspond to policies on land use. It is not difficult to foresee what might happen in a given area where land use plans are not coordinated with plans for public facilities. For example, an extension of a major public facility, such as a sewer, might result in unanticipated or undesirable patterns of land use in that area.

### Combination Plans

The third major type of subplan, or plan element, found in a Comprehensive Plan are those plan elements combining both land use and public facility development policies. The plan for a central business district (CBD) would be an example of such a plan element of the Comprehensive Plan. Policies on the development of public land uses and facilities (streets, on-street parking, utilities, etc.)--must dovetail with policies on the development of adjoining privately-owned land (used for shopping, offices, off-street parking, etc.), if the CBD Plan is to succeed. Plans for particular neighborhoods (residential ur

within a community require that the development of private lands be coordinated with the development of public lands and facilities.

#### Segregate Comprehensive Plan From Other Information

In compiling the various subplans and plan elements which together constitute the Comprehensive Plan of the community, the Planning Board should take special precaution to ensure that material incorporated within the Plan is exclusively devoted to a listing and an explanation of public policies for future community growth and development. Material dealing with goal formulation on conducting surveys or analyses of the community should be entirely excluded from the plan material. This background or introductory material, although probably helpful in understanding the rationale of the comprehensive plan, could be presented as a plan introduction, but it must not be associated with, or confused with the plan itself.

One approach to the presentation of material dealt with in the overall comprehensive planning process would be to compile a Comprehensive Planning Document which would be divided into five major sections. Each section of the Document would be devoted to a major phase of the comprehensive planning process, i.e., (1) community goals and objectives, (2) community survey, (3) community analysis, (4) the comprehensive plan, and (5) comprehensive plan implementation.

#### 5. Implement Comprehensive Plan

The fifth, and final, phase of the comprehensive planning process is the implementation of the community's Comprehensive Plan. A Comprehensive Plan is not worth the paper it is printed on unless it can

be implemented. Thousands of comprehensive plans gather dust on bookshelves because what they propose could not be brought into reality. However, there are a variety of methods that can be used to avoid an exercise in futility and to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan will be a useful and practical guide for community growth and development. These methods of plan implementation include, but are necessarily limited to, public education, imposition of codes and ordinances, capital improvements programming, and conformance of proposals and plans for specific projects to the Comprehensive Plan.

#### Public Education

If the citizenry are properly informed and educated on the community's comprehensive planning process, they will support the efforts of the Planning Board and the elected officials in spearheading a community planning effort. A program of public information about community planning should be instigated very early in the planning program. An effective public relations program should include timely and informative press releases to local news media. Also, a series of public hearings should be scheduled to further educate and inform the public about the process of comprehensive planning. If people truly understand the nature and aims of community planning, they will be willing to make individual sacrifices for the public good.

#### Codes and Ordinances

Under the "police powers" granted by the State to it, a local government can regulate and control certain activities if the public health, safety, or welfare is at stake. Urban growth and development and associated changes in land use clearly require regulation by the



community under the guise of police powers. Codes and ordinances enacted under authority of the police powers of local government for the purpose of regulating the use of private land include, but are not limited to, zoning regulations, subdivision regulations, building codes, housing codes, and fire codes.

### Zoning Regulations

The primary purpose of zoning regulations is implementing officially-adopted land use policies which are outlined and described in the land use plan element of the Comprehensive Plan. Although many communities have adopted zoning regulations which are not based on a Comprehensive Plan, these zoning regulations are probably not as effective as they might be if they were based on articulated and officially-adopted policies on land use.

Zoning regulations effectively control land use by establishing districts. Within each district, certain uses are permitted or prohibited. Also, zoning controls population density by regulating the minimum size of building lots, and the placement of buildings upon lots, specifying minimum building setbacks, the size of required yards, and maximum area that a building may occupy on its site.

### Subdivision Regulations

Within a new or proposed land subdivision, subdivision regulations effectively control the arrangement of building sites and the quality of public facilities serving those sites. Thus, subdivision regulations can carry out land use and public facility policies previously set forth in the Comprehensive Plan. By granting or withholding a recommendation for the governing body to approve a particular subdivision, the Planning

Board has the legal responsibility to ensure that the proposed subdivision conforms to all applicable laws and regulations, and is in the best interest of not only those who may reside in the subdivision, but is generally in the community's interest and welfare. The Board must consider the overall design of the subdivision, its relation to the topography and other natural features of the site, and it also must make certain that all necessary public improvements (streets, water lines, sewers, sidewalks, park and recreation areas, school sites, etc.) are properly designed and constructed.

#### Building Codes

Building codes are necessary for public health and safety because they regulate the types of building materials and the methods of construction that can be used in erecting new buildings. Building codes can prevent possible loss of life and property by requiring good workmanship practices and the use of quality building materials. Assuming that quality construction is among the goals and policies of the community Comprehensive Plan, a properly-enforced building code can implement that Plan.

#### Housing Codes

Housing codes can implement the Comprehensive Plan by enforcing standards dealing with the residential environment. For example, housing codes can specify the maximum number of persons, per room, that can be housed within a building. Also, housing codes can force the abandonment of a structure that is deemed unfit for human habitation and require its demolition.

#### Fire Codes

Fire codes can be used to effectuate policies on public safety, set forth in the Comprehensive Plan. These codes protect persons and



property from fires in buildings by requiring that certain buildings be constructed with fireproof materials. Of greatest concern are buildings which are intensively used by the public, such as office buildings and shops. Generally, a community's "fire zone" would include all buildings of a commercial or office character.

#### Capital Improvements Programming

Capital improvements programming establishes the timing and the financing of needed capital improvements. Thus, policies and plans for the development of many public facilities can be implemented through the use of these programs. Through the public facility plan element of its Comprehensive Plan, the community establishes priorities of need for the construction of roads, water lines, sewer lines, public buildings, or other major public facilities. Thus, the capital improvements program will call for the construction of certain facilities during the first year, certain facilities during the second year, etc. In setting the time frame for facility construction, the capital improvements program will also take into account various revenue sources from which the capital improvements will be financed, (e.g., bond issues, revenue bonds, general obligation bonds, special improvement districts, sales taxes, property taxes, etc.), and establish a budget for capital improvements construction.

#### Specific Plans and Proposals

In its review of proposed land subdivisions, the Planning Board should use the Comprehensive Plan as a guide in making its decisions. This question should be posed in evaluating any proposal for a subdivision or other development within its jurisdiction or purview: "Does the proposal conform to those policies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan?"

The major point to be made is that the Comprehensive Plan should be used as a primary information source, to be consulted by the Planning Board and elected officials in rendering decisions about growth and development issues in the community.

### Restrictive Covenants

One method of land use control which could be utilized in implementing the Comprehensive Plan is the use of restrictive covenants. All purchasers of property in certain subdivisions or other developments must agree to use their properties in certain specified ways, and according to certain restrictions. An example of a restrictive covenant would be a requirement that all owners of lots within the subdivision must build residences having at least 1,000 square feet of living area. Restrictive covenants could exclude mobile homes from the development, or they could require an owner to keep his property free from junk cars or other objectionable material.

Since restrictive covenants are private agreements among individuals, the covenants can be enforced only by a party to the agreements bringing a civil suit against another party to the agreements to force compliance. Thus, restrictive covenants are unlike zoning and other police power ordinances; they cannot be enforced by a governmental agency.

The Planning Board, in its review of a proposed subdivision, may require the subdivider to impose certain restrictive covenants on land within the subdivision, if it feels that it is in the public interest to do so. By requiring restrictive covenants on the land in a subdivision as a condition of its favorable recommendation, the Planning Board can ensure that certain policies written into the Comprehensive Plan are carried out.

## THE CONTINUOUS AND ONGOING NATURE OF A COMMUNITY PLANNING EFFORT

Once a community's Comprehensive Plan has been researched and written, and has been implemented through zoning and other implementation methods, it becomes necessary to begin anew, to repeat the comprehensive planning process. The community never remains static. As it begins to change, goals and objectives need to be revised. The characteristics of the population will have changed, reflecting the in-migration of new persons into the community. Environmental conditions in the community will have changed, and there will be a different set of issues and problems arising out of the new community growth and development that has occurred. The political climate will have changed since the old Comprehensive Plan was written, and new policies and plans need to be formulated by the Planning Board and elected officials. A new Comprehensive Plan should be adopted by the elected officials. Zoning and other mechanisms must be revised to implement the new Comprehensive Plan.

A community must maintain its interest and enthusiasm in caring about its future. Its planning effort should always reflect the current thinking of community citizens, and the entire community should be involved in the never-ending process of comprehensive planning.

# THE COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS

## 1. DEVELOP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

## 2. CONDUCT SURVEYS

<u>People</u>	+	<u>Land</u>	=	<u>Environment</u>
Population (numbers, age, sex, race)		Geology, Soils		Land Use (Type, In- tensity, Geog. Dist.)
Educ. Levels		Topography		Public/Quasi-Public Facilities
Cultural, Ethnic		Hydrology, Drainage		Housing
Government/Political		Climate		Air, Land, and Water Pollution
Employment/Income		Native Flora and Fauna		

## 3. UNDERTAKE ANALYSIS--Evaluate the quality and quantity of the human environment and related human activity patterns in light of GOALS and STANDARDS. Revise goals if necessary.

## 4. PREPARE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan should be a statement of officially-adopted policies of the governing bodies on future growth and development of the community.

<u>Land Use Plans</u> (Private Land)	<u>Public Facilities Plans</u>	<u>Combination Plans</u>
Housing	Circulation	CBD
Commercial	Recreation/Open Space	Neighborhood
Industrial	Utilities	Other
Agricultural	Public Safety	
	Public Health	
	Public Administration	
	Schools	
	Libraries	

## 5. IMPLEMENT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN--A Comprehensive Plan is worthless unless it can be fully and effectively carried out.

<u>Public</u> <u>Educ.</u>	<u>Codes</u> <u>and</u> <u>Ordinan-</u> <u>ces</u>	<u>Capital</u> <u>Improve-</u> <u>ments</u> <u>Program-</u> <u>ming</u>	<u>Specific</u> <u>Plans</u> <u>and</u> <u>Proposals</u>	<u>Other</u> Restrictive Covenants
(Public will accept Com- prehensive Plan if they are properly informed)	Zoning Subdivision Building Housing Fire Other		(Do they con- form to the Comprehen- sive Plan?)	





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